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RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 2772
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 3188
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 5633
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2316
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

AF/S FOR B. WALCH
DRL FOR N. WILETT
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
ADDIS ABABA FOR ACSS
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR M. GAVIN
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR L.DOBINS AND E.LOKEN

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [EAID](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: PEACE (BUT NOT PROSPERITY) RETURNS TO MAZOWE CENTRAL

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) During election violence that stretched across Zimbabwe in 2008, few areas were hit harder than the Mazowe Central constituency in the heartland of Mashonaland Central province. We recently went to the rural area to visit a site for a proposed project for the Ambassador's Self Help fund. We were impressed with the resilience of the population and the peace that has returned to this area where Ambassador McGee was briefly detained at a rural hospital in May 2008 while visiting violence victims. Before the March 2008 elections, all eight of the constituency's councilors and were from ZANU-PF. Now MDC has seven councilors and the MP, while ZANU-PF has only one councilor. Although the new MP is optimistic about his constituency's future, he remains deeply concerned that ZANU-PF's intimidation structures remain intact and that he needs to deliver improvements to ensure continued MDC support. END SUMMARY.

2008: Mazowe Central Turned Its Back on ZANU-PF...

¶2. (U) In the March 2008 harmonized elections, Mazowe Central, a rural constituency of about 26,000 registered voters located an hour's drive north of Harare, turned dramatically away from ZANU-PF and voted for the MDC. Before the election, the local NGO Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) summarized the characteristics of the constituency, which was created in 2008 from portions of the Mazowe East and West constituencies. According to the ZESN report, most of the youth in Mazowe Central were unemployed and relied on subsistence farming. ZANU-PF had always been favored in this area, and that support was strengthened with the initiation of the so-called "fast-track" land reform program in 2000.

¶3. (U) Despite a tradition of supporting ZANU-PF, in the March 2008 elections Mazowe Central voted out seven of eight ZANU-PF councilors and elected MDC-T's Shepherd Mushonga as MP. Mushonga, a lawyer, had run for office as an MDC-T candidate several times since the

party was formed in 2000. He won his seat by just 145 votes, defeating the ZANU-PF candidate, Chenhamo Chimutengwende, who was also the Minister of State for Public and Interactive Affairs and had been an MP since 1985. With 59.7 percent of the vote, Morgan Tsvangirai dramatically beat Robert Mugabe among Mazowe Central voters.

... And Faced Violent Retribution

¶4. (SBU) After the March 2008 elections, violence struck hard in Mazowe Central. In May 2008, Ambassador McGee led a caravan of ambassadors and journalists to visit one of Mazowe Central's rural public hospitals, Rosa Clinic. Zimbabwean security forces attempted to block the ambassadors from leaving the clinic. As a result of the visit, images of the victims of rural election violence were broadcast to the world. Mushonga was in hiding for several weeks during the electoral period, fearing he might become a victim as well. In a recent conversation, he praised Ambassador McGee's bravery in visiting the clinic and standing up to the security forces, saying "we need more like him."

¶5. (SBU) During a recent visit to Mazowe Central, we met one of the newly-elected MDC councilors, Martin Musemwa. He told us that in 2008 ZANU-PF supporters stole property from his home including two solar panels, five goats, and 51 of his 54 chickens - the goats and chickens were eaten by ZANU-PF youths or war vets at nearby bases. Although he reported the stolen property to the police, no action

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was ever taken. He felt somewhat vindicated, however, that the ZANU-PF supporter who led the thuggery in his area had fled to South Africa.

Is Spiritual Vengeance Enough?

¶6. (U) When we asked about retribution or justice for victims of violence or theft during the 2008 election period, Musemwa and Mushonga told us that Mazowe North MP Cairo Mhandu (ZANU-PF) had "gone mad" (i.e. insane) as a result of his involvement in violence in his constituency. On May 4, 2008 over 70 villagers were brutally beaten and tortured during a ZANU-PF re-education session in Chaona, in Mazowe North; six men died from their extensive injuries. Mushonga told us that Mhandu later wanted to give a cow to the family of one victim through one of the local traditional leaders, Chief Makope. The chief reportedly refused to serve as an intermediary, telling Mhandu to do it himself. Mhandu, however, never did. Musemwa and Mushonga both seemed resigned that the police would not investigate crimes from 2008, but also placated that some perpetrators may face spiritual vengeance. (NOTE: According to local traditional beliefs, vengeful spirits known as "ngozi" come from people who were mistreated while alive or killed without just cause. Many perpetrators of violence report they have been haunted by the "ngozi," who come back to exact revenge. "Ngozi" are believed to be capable of causing disease and hardship and may haunt the perpetrators to death if they are not appeased. By presenting the family of the victim with a significant gift, such as a cow, the perpetrator could hope to appease the "ngozi" who haunt him. END NOTE.)

¶7. (U) According to Musemwa and Mushonga, calm has returned to the area. Although there are reports that in other rural areas ZANU-PF youths and war veterans have re-established bases or are holding meetings and intimidating members of the opposition, none of these things have happened in Mazowe Central. Zimbabwe Peace Project, a local NGO that tracks human rights violations through a network of local monitors, confirmed that Mazowe is "quiet" and that very few cases of violence or intimidation have been reported in recent months.

¶8. (SBU) Nonetheless, Musemwa and Mushonga told us that ZANU-PF

maintains its presence through 14,000 Ministry of Youth "Ward Officers" deployed nationwide who were previously within the ranks of the ZANU-PF youths. These "Ward Officers" are supposed to work with local councilors to help distribute seed and other handouts from the government. Most in the MDC and civil society view these "Ward Officers" as a blatant effort by ZANU-PF to maintain a conspicuous and threatening presence in rural areas that could rapidly re-initiate intimidation and violence in the event of an election or constitutional referendum. In his constituency, Odelection or constitutional referendum. In his constituency, Mushonga has identified MDC youths to work with the "Ward Officers" to keep tabs on their activities. Although the MDC youths are not paid and they are demoralized that the ZANU-PF youths are receiving government salaries for essentially nothing, Mushonga believes his efforts have stemmed ZANU-PF's ability to use these youths effectively. (NOTE: We have previously heard that many ZANU-PF youths were absorbed into the Ministry of Youth and the Ministry of Gender and Women's Affairs. The Ministry of Public Service is seeking to undertake a survey of all government employees, but it is unclear if that survey will identify these individuals who are not "ghost" workers, but rather government workers without a legitimate job. END NOTE.)

"Green Valley" Still Hungers for Help

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¶ 9. (SBU) Mushonga and Musemwa both lamented that the Mazowe area has been labeled a "green valley" and was therefore not eligible for food assistance. Although they admit the landscape was once covered with fertile farms, now rural farmers struggle to scratch an existence on subsistence plots. Many areas lack irrigation and most of the rich commercial farms produce crops such as oranges and wheat that are sold in Harare or exported. Musemwa told us that rural shops lack adequate seed and fertilizer, and that if such goods were available rural citizens would find a way to buy it.

¶ 10. (U) As we toured the prospective Self Help project -- a new borehole pump to supply the Bell Rock Primary School and surrounding community with water -- Musemwa estimated that 75 percent of the school's 600 students were orphans. School officials showed us the school's impressive garden where students and teachers grow vegetables to help support the students' participation in sports competitions with nearby schools. The borehole pump, which was installed in 1974 during the liberation war, functioned until 2007 when it finally broke after several years of neglect by the parastatal Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA), which took over the borehole in 1999. For the last two years, students and teachers have carried water from a river one kilometer away to water the garden. The headmaster told us that many students were affected by cholera during the nationwide epidemic last year.

¶ 11. (SBU) Although Mushonga believed Musemwa overestimated the proportion of orphaned children at the school, he concurred that many children in his area have been orphaned by HIV/AIDS and live in child-headed households or with their grandmothers. He regretted that food assessments had labeled his area a "green valley," particularly in light of the large population of vulnerable children. He told us that when he asked why his area was deemed unworthy of food assistance, government officials told him that they "had to say something was green" so as not to embarrass the government.

¶ 12. (U) Mushonga and Musemwa lamented that the rural councils have not been able to tax or levy households or businesses to improve services. In many of these small communities, residents refuse to give up their precious dollars to the council to improve services, demanding instead that services be improved first before they will pay.

¶ 13. (SBU) Although we explained to Mushonga that our ability to provide assistance to additional projects in his constituency was limited, he eagerly presented us with two more proposals: construction and sanitation for a primary school and a clinic. With

the government struggling to pay bills, Mushonga has few options other than to seek help from potential donors.

COMMENT

¶14. (SBU) In 2008, the Self Help Coordinator could not visit Bell Rock Primary due to widespread violence and the risk of travel in the area. In a marked contrast from the Ambassador's visit to Rosa Clinic in May 2008, our visit in August 2009 attracted relatively little attention, and the few police manning roadblocks lazily waved us past without any questions. Our ability to travel freely is in itself a testament to the dramatic change in the political climate. The MDC officials in rural areas, such as Mazowe, feel pressure to deliver on improved services in substantive ways. Although donors continue to support the Zimbabwean people through humanitarian assistance, some areas believe they are neglected by national-level efforts. If Mushonga and his MDC colleagues can't deliver better services, will the rural population be more easily convinced to vote for ZANU-PF again? END COMMENT.

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